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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000137

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: ASSASSINATIONS HALT IN NAJAF

REF: HILLAH 104

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CLASSIFIED BY: Angus Simmons, Team Leader, PRT Najaf, DOS.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[11](#). (U) This is a PRT Najaf cable.

[12](#). (C) SUMMARY: During the three month period from June 13 - September 14, 2007, Najafis witnessed a sharp increase in the number of targeted assassinations, largely attributed to jaysh al-mahdi (JAM). These killings, predominantly in the form of drive-by shootings, claimed the lives of eleven police officers, three associates of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and more than a dozen other Najafis. However, since September 14, the killings in Najaf suddenly have stopped, notwithstanding an unsuccessful assassination attempt on September 24. END SUMMARY.

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A CAMPAIGN OF ASSASSINATIONS  
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[13](#). (U) According to the Najaf Iraqi Police (IP), during the period of March 1 - May 31, 2007, 22 people were killed in Najaf. Of these 22 people, only two appeared to be the victims of targeted assassination. The rest were killed by IEDs and VBIEDs, including one car bomb on March 23 that killed two IPs and a civilian, and another on May 17 in Kufa that claimed 17 lives. In both VBIED attacks, Najaf security officials attributed the attacks to sectarian militants; in the March 23 incident, police arrested the vehicle's driver, whom they described as a member of a "Sunni extremist cult."

[14](#). (U) Beginning on June 13, however, a pattern of targeted assassinations in Najaf quickly emerged. Over the ensuing three months, eleven IPs - one together with his wife - were killed, mostly in drive-by shootings. For example, on June 22, gunmen in a Toyota sedan killed CPT Tarig Jalil al-Bahadly, Deputy Director of Najaf IP's Anti-Terrorism Unit, in downtown Kufa before speeding away. On June 23, armed men on a motorcycle killed Haider Hadi, a non-commissioned IP officer in Kufa. On July 11, gunmen shot and killed a non-commissioned officer at the front door of his home before speeding away. On August 8, gunmen driving a black sedan seriously injured a Lieutenant from the Haidariya sub-district police station. On September 3, a sniper shot and killed the Deputy Police Chief of Kufa with one bullet to the head.

[15](#). (U) In addition to the Najaf IP, associates of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani appear to have been the targeted. On July 20, Sheikh Abdullah Falak al-Malaki, an associate of al-Sistani was knifed to death in his home near the Holy Shrine of Imam Ali. On July 26, gunmen riddled the vehicle of Kadhum al-Budairi with bullets

as he drove from Najaf to Kufa. Al-Budairi, a former Holy Shrine Protection official and an associate of al-Sistani, was pronounced dead at the scene. Finally, August 2, gunmen killed al-Sistani deputy Sheikh Fadel al-Aqel near his home in Najaf.

¶16. (U) Assailants appear to have targeted other categories of Najafis. During the three month period, there were five unsuccessful assassination attempts against former and current Najaf government officials, including one attempt against former Deputy Governor Ali Sheibani and two attempts against the Director of the Najaf Media Center. In addition, on September 14, an official in the Najaf Education Department was killed in a drive-by shooting near his home. During the three-month period in question, assailants killed two former interpreters for Coalition forces, three former Baath party members, and eight private citizens.

¶17. (U) For a two week period following Muqtada al-Sadr's August 29 announcement of a "freeze" on JAM activities, the killings in Najaf continued unabated, including the September 7 murder of Mohamed Abdul Kadhum Mohamed al-Kar'awi, a JAM leader and close associate of al-Sadr. However, since September 14, the killings in Najaf suddenly have stopped, notwithstanding an unsuccessful assassination attempt on September 24 against a prominent local Iraqi National Accord official.

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RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE KILLINGS, THE CALM  
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¶18. (C) While Najaf IP made few arrests in the numerous killings, police and government officials have stated that they suspect JAM to be responsible for the violence. In particular, Najaf Governor Asaad Sulmaan Abu Gelal Al-Ta'ie, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), pointed to al-Sadr loyalist Ahmed al-Sheibani as the driving force behind the assassination of police and former Baathists, as well as the attack on the former

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Deputy Governor. In a July 11 meeting with 3ID Deputy Division Commander and PRTOff, the Najaf Governor further accused Ahmed al-Sheibani of implementing a plan of violence designed to test the resolve of the local security forces (reftel).

¶19. (C) Najaf officials proposed alternative explanations for some of the violence. Former Deputy Governor Ali Sheibani insisted in meetings with PRTOffs that current Najaf Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein Baqir Abtan, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), was responsible for the attempt on Sheibani's life.

In a June 9 meeting with PRTOffs, Najaf IP Chief Abudul Kareem Mustafa Al-Mayahi claimed that many of the killings were motivated not by politics but rather by greed or a desire to settle old personal grudges. NOTE: On August 1, Najaf IP arrested Hayder Abood Mubarak in the stabbing death of al-Sistani aide Sheikh Abdullah Falak al-Malaki. Mubarak, until the killing a domestic employee of al-Malaki, was also charged with stealing 170,000 US\$ from the home of his former employer. END NOTE.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Given the nature and targets of the attacks, it seems likely that elements of JAM were responsible for the majority of the targeted killings. The relative calm in Najaf since al-Sadr's order for JAM to stand down lends further credibility to this conclusion. While the peace that has ensued since September 14 may be due in large part to the increased security surrounding the October 4 anniversary of the death of Imam Ali, it also provides further evidence of the overall JAM compliance with the freeze order. END COMMENT.

SIMMONS